The Essays

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The Essays

by veins_of_wax

Summary

Mr Keating really should've known what to expect when he asked his class to write a short essay on their favourite poet.

-or-
Mr Keating gets handed 6 essays on why Todd Anderson is the greatest poet of their generation. And also how head over heels in love Neil Perry is with him.

Homework

Friday 3:55

"Alright, on to your homework for this weekend," Mr Keating began. A collective groan from the class interrupted. "Oh it's not that bad. I want you each to write me a short essay, 300-700 words, on who your favourite poet is and why. Have it emailed to me by Monday. That's all, and have a good weekend."

"You too," the class mumbled. They shuffled their way out of the class, it was the last of the day so they could spend the next few hours doing whatever they wanted before dinner. Neil wanted to get started on his homework right away so as not to let anything get forgotten. He had a few science questions that would take about 15 minutes and the essay that Keating had just set.

He got through the science questions fairly easily and opened his laptop to start his essay. He wasn't really sure who he was going to write about. Just as he was thinking about it Todd opened the door and walked into the room.

"Just grabbing my coat, I'm gonna go for a walk," he said. "Want to come with me?"

Neil shook his head lightly. "I'm going to try to get a start on the English homework, but I'll see you at dinner yeah?"

"Yeah, see you later." Todd replied, waving as he walked back out of the room.

Neil grinned to himself. He knew who he was going to write about now.

Christmas 2021

Chapter Notes

> i think the way i'm gonna do this is that each chapter will focus on a different person's essay, but as well as that it'll look at a different time in which neil was completely gone for todd.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Monday 4:00PM

Mr Keating stretched back in his desk chair. He had his emails open and was going through the homework he had set his class on Friday evening. He scrolled down his emails looking for some of the boys names. He found a few, in the subject they had included who they wrote about. There were a few Walt Whitman's, Edgar Allen Poe, Maya Angelou, Oscar Wilde, Rupi Kaur and a few other recognisable names. Then he saw the subject of Charlie Dalton's email.

Todd Anderson. This seemed interesting.

Charlie Dalton- Todd Anderson

Out of all the poets we've studied I don't think any of them will beat Todd. He writes probably more than all of us in class combined. And the fact that pretty much all of his poems actually mean something and aren't just nonsense is pretty cool too.

He wrote us all personal poems for Christmas last year, which was awesome. I think the person that appreciated it the most was Neil. He tried to hide how thrilled he was but he didn't do it very well. You should've seen the way his face lit up, he would NOT stop smiling.

I think one of the main reasons he's my favourite poet is because of the time in class when he was nervous and didn't write a poem for our assignment. When you put him on the spot and he just came out with the best poem we had heard all day it was amazing. I don't think many people could do that as easily as he did. I know I couldn't.

I've read some of his poems, not a lot of them, but there's one thing that I can take away from them. His rhyming game is strong. With a lot of poetry that people write for school the rhyming sounds like a little kid wrote it but Todd's doesn't. I think he likes free verse more than rhyming scheme though.

Todd has a pretty unique gift and I really hope that he chooses to pursue it when he graduates.

Well done Mr. Dalton. Next time push to make it a little bit longer, but other than that it was informative and written to a good standard.

Christmas 2021

"Could you guys maybe, close your eyes?" Todd asked. Neil was the first to reply by slapping his hand over his face.

"Sure thing." Everyone else followed suit and soon Todd had laid down his present for each of the poets. He sat back down and sort of cleared his throat to let them know he was done.

"Can we open our eyes now?" Pitts asked.

"Yeah."

They all opened their eyes and looked down. In front of each of them was a cream coloured piece of card with Todd's neat handwriting in the middle. Meeks realised what he had made them before everyone else did.

"Todd," he began. "Did you write us all personalised poems?"

"Uh, yeah. I-I did." Todd swallowed. "It's okay if you don't like them-"

"Hey I did *not* say that." Meeks smiled. "This has to be the best present I've gotten."

Todd blushed and looked at everyone else. They were all in various states of awe. But Neil was who he was really looking at. He had possibly the biggest smile on his face that any of them had ever seen. It took him about three minutes to form words.

"Congratulations Todd," Pitts whispered to him. "You broke Neil."

After a few more seconds Neil finally said something. "This is the most amazing thing anyone has ever done for me."

Todd went an impossible shade of red and smiled to himself. "I, uh, wrote them all to kind of reflect you, I guess? I mean, they're

obviously all about you, but like Cameron yours is a haiku cause you tend to keep to the rules. So a haiku made the most sense because it's a defined set of rules to write it, 3 lines, 5 syllables in the first line, 7 in the second, and 5 again in the last line. Neil I wrote a soliloquy for you because they can be used in plays for characters' monologues. Some of them were more jokes though. Like Pitts yours is a Limerick, because the rhyming scheme is a-a-b-b-a which if you said it out loud it would sound like ABBA, and I know you like them."

"Wow," Cameron said, shaking his head a little. "This is so well thought out. Thank you."

"Hey wait a minute." Charlie questioned. "Why is mine an acrostic poem?"

Cameron sniggered and Knox turned to face Charlie. "Because of the absolute child you are." He deadpanned.

"Yeah yeah I got it, no need to be a bastard about it." He scowled.

"Oh you love me really."

"Right now I love Todd more. Thanks for this insult dear friend, I shall cherish it forever."

Todd just shrugged and laughed. He looked at Neil who was still smiling at him. In Charlie's opinion, Neil looked like he was staring at the brightest star in the sky. Which in Neil's universe, he was fairly sure that's what Todd was.

Chapter End Notes

> hello good people, i hope you like this story so far! i'm back in school now so if this doesn't update for like a week or two then sorry about that it's just it's an exam year for me so i gotta get in the studying. but mark my words i WILL finish this. i promise.
>
> p.s. rip the queen i guess? i'm irish so honestly it isn't really a big deal for me but i was pretty sure she'd end up outliving me somehow

IKEA in January

Chapter Notes

live laugh love ikea

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mr. Keating sent Charlie his corrections and continued to look through the other essays. He wasn't expecting to see another email with Todd Anderson in the subject line, but Knox Overstreet always was full of surprises.

Knox Overstreet- Todd Anderson

Todd Anderson is my favourite poet.

One of the main reasons is because he writes about relatable stuff a lot of the time. But even if at its core it's the most simple of things he still makes the words say more. He's really good at describing his feelings which is something that can be hard to do.

His poem in front of the class that day was completely unexpected. I knew he was pretty shy and that it affected his participation in class, and speaking up for himself, but I also kind of assumed he was one of those guys who just didn't do much work. I was very obviously proved wrong. He works harder than most of us to be honest.

I hope that someday he publishes some of his poems because I really do think that everyone else in the world should have the option to read something written by Todd.

I've only ever read a few of his poems, but the ones I have read have been wonderful. His writing is very descriptive and paints images in your head really nicely. He once gifted us all poems as gifts. They were amazing, and they were personalised to fit each of us. We all have them pinned up in our respective rooms. Neil framed his. Me and Charlie went with him to IKEA to buy the frame, it was hilarious. It took him about 40 minutes to find "the perfect frame". I think it was kind of overkill but I wasn't going to argue.

Todd really does have something special when it comes to poetry. He writes it so effortlessly and it's astounding. He writes such amazing love poems and from what I know he hasn't ever been in a relationship, which is kind of awesome that he's just able to spout all

of these preachings of love. If he wasn't as shy as he is I'm sure he would have some Romeo level charm.

To conclude, Todd Anderson is my favourite poet, and a pretty awesome one too.

Good job Mr. Overstreet, this was an excellent essay. It is interesting to see the perspective of my students on their peers. You are the second person I have come across today that wrote their essay on Mr Anderson, and I suspect you won't be the last.

IKEA in January

"Shut up Charlie!" Neil hissed.

Charlie raised his hands in surrender. "Hey, look, I was just making an observation."

"Your observation was *wrong* ."

"What are you two arguing about now?" Knox asked as he walked around the corner.

"Charlie said I'm in love with Todd."

"Neil is in love with Todd."

"I am not!"

"You so are!"

"No I'm not."

"Yes."

"No."

"Ye-"

"Shut up both of you," Knox pleaded. He never should have agreed to driving them here.

"I'll shut up when Charlie stops making baseless accusations."

“Baseless?” Charlie questioned, raising his eyebrow.

“He has a point.” Knox agreed.

“Not you too!”

“Neil, think about it for a minute, okay?” Knox said, taking a breath. “It’s a Friday night. We could be anywhere right now. At a poets meeting, in town, watching movies. But we aren’t doing any of that. We’re in fucking IKEA getting a frame for a poem that Todd wrote you, and so far you’ve rejected every single one we’ve picked up.” He finished by gesturing to all the jilted frames around them (it was all of them).

“I-,” Neil started. Then he paused and gave a defeated sigh. “I can’t really argue with that, can I?”

“Afraid not, you love sick fool,” Charlie shrugged. Knox flicked him in the back of the head. “Hey that hurt!”

“What hurt?” Knox asked innocently.

“Dickhead,” Charlie grumbled.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Charlie replied, plastering a fake smile on and kissing Knox’s cheek. “ *Sweetheart* .”

Knox stuck his tongue out and Charlie laughed.

‘*Yeah* I’m *the love sick one,’* Neil thought to himself. He kept walking and flicked through the frames in front of him. None of them were really doing it for him. He didn’t want just a basic black or white one, which was pretty much what made up most of the IKEA frame section. But he was determined to find something. He was going to bring the poem with him to measure it on the frames but he was scared it would get damaged so he just measured the page and left it in a folder, tucked away safely in the bottom of his desk drawer.

IKEA had a very specific clientele. It was usually people twice their age with mortgages. Not high school students, so they did get a few weird looks every so often. But Neil wasn’t too bothered.

Neil started to think about what Charlie and Knox had said about him being in love with Todd. He wasn’t, surely? Todd was his best friend,

and sometimes you just happen to spend your entire Friday night out looking for a picture frame that you can put a poem in that your best friend wrote you. That's not weird, that's just being appreciative, right?

He picked up a frame that was hidden beneath some plain black ones and turned it in his hands. It was brown and wooden. It was definitely the one. He knew it would fit the page perfectly and wouldn't clash with their room. He looked around him and spotted Charlie and Knox. Knox was currently chasing Charlie with a sweeping brush through the aisles. He wasn't sure *where* he had found a sweeping brush in the frames section. Knox accidentally bumped into a women's trolley and knocked a few candles out. While he was apologising profusely Charlie ducked down behind a shelf. After Knox had finished picking up the lady's candles he walked on. Just before he had walked too far Charlie jumped up and kissed him. The two of them dissolved into giggles, wrapped in each other's arms. Neil smiled to himself. He desperately wanted something like that, and maybe he was beginning to realise who exactly he wanted it with.

Chapter End Notes

> i can't physically read or write mr. anderson without hearing hugo weaving in my head. i blame my dad.

Game Night

Chapter Notes

new chapter? i think the fuck so

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mr Keating clicked send on his reply to Knox's essay and began flicking through the other submissions. He graded a few and then came across Stephen Meeks. He was begging to sense a theme.

Stephen Meeks- Todd Anderson

My favourite poet of all time is Todd Anderson.

You might be thinking to yourself, why? Well this essay is going to explain that.

Todd just has so much passion for poetry, when he's not writing it he's reading it, or discussing it with you. Which always makes for interesting conversations. I don't think once in the entire time I've known him have I seen him without a notebook in his hands, even when he isn't using it, he carries it around like he's waiting for inspiration to strike. I think that's cool.

Sometimes he and Neil go for random walks and I've read a few poems that he wrote about the walks that they go on. From what I can tell, even though he constantly complains about being dragged around by Neil, he loves it, really. It gives him the inspiration he strives for. If Neil knew that Todd writes poems about him I think he would combust.

He has such an amazing way of conveying ideas through words. Also, Todd has an astounding vocabulary. If he told me he had studied the dictionary I would believe him. On Saturday's we usually have a game night, and we used to play a game where we would flick open the dictionary to a random page and pick a word. Whoever's turn it was would have to define it and if you got it right then you got a point. I don't think he's ever once lost that game. It's impressive.

His poetry is so fun to read. I haven't read heaps of it but I've read enough to know just how important he'll be to poetry. The images it paints in your head are so clear and sometimes I think that if he were to put some of his poems to music he would be making so much

money. Maybe we could form a band. Todd can write and sing the lyrics, Charlie can play sax and the rest of us can learn an instrument to contribute.

Todd has such an amazing talent and it's really cool to have a friend like that. If he doesn't go into something super artsy in college I'm going to be severely surprised.

Excellent Mr. Meeks, very descriptive and overall a well written essay.

Game Night

"No fucking way." Charlie scoffed. "You have to be cheating. You just have to be."

"And how exactly would I cheat at this?" Todd asked, arching his eyebrow.

"No idea, to be honest. Maybe you can read minds."

"Trust me Charlie, yours is the last mind I'd want to be reading." Todd shuddered.

Charlie smirked and wiggled his eyebrows at Knox. "Oh yeah? Wanna know what I'm thinking about right now?"

"NO!" Everyone shouted.

"Fine, fine. Now, back to my point." He said, turning back to Todd. "How the fuck do you know so many words?"

"I don't know? Books maybe. I've read a lot of books."

"When he says a lot," Neil started, "he means a lot. So much so that his book case was full so he had to use mine."

"You said I could though!" Todd protested, his cheeks going slightly pink.

"Oh yeah, I know. It doesn't bother me. I'm good to indulge in your reading habits." He smiled.

Todd was an extremely avid reader. Neil thought it was cute. When he

would finish a book he would tell Neil all about it. So most of the time Neil had pretty much read the books as well. It was especially fun, when they would be sitting in their room and Todd would just start muttering exclamations under his breath. It usually took under ten seconds for him to start explaining to Neil what was happening. Or if he was reading poetry, he would show Neil the poem and then tell him all about what it meant, and why he liked it. It was something that Neil treasured, little moments where it was just them in their own bubble, entering a different universe for a few minutes. He wouldn't change it for the world.

"Okay, so books are the answer to your vocabulary wisdom?" Knox asked.

"Yeah, I'd say so." Todd nodded.

"Alright my turn," Meeks said, passing the dictionary that was currently in his hand to Pitts. He flicked through it with his eyes closed and pointed at a random spot once he stopped flicking.

"The word is nonplussed." He hummed, looking expectantly at Meeks.

"Uh, maybe like, not caring?"

"That your final answer?" Neil asked, peering at him over Pitts shoulder.

"Sure."

"WRONG!" Pitts announces. "The definition is: surprised and confused so that you do not know what to do or say."

"Oh."

Knox picked up a wipe and rubbed a point off Meeks' score on the whiteboard. It really was a mystery how they had managed to sneak a whiteboard into the cave, they had nearly dropped it about 5 times on their way down the stairs. So far Todd had 7 points, he was in the lead. After that was Pitts with 5, Meeks now with 4, Neil had 3, as well as Knox. Then Charlie and Cameron had 2.

"Todd, you've basically won already." Neil said, patting him on the back.

"You guys could still catch up," he shrugged.

“I highly doubt that,” Charlie laughed. “How about an all or nothing round?”

“I’m intrigued.” Todd said.

“If you get the next word, you win and I’ll do your homework for a week, you lose, then you have to do one piece of each of our homework.”

“Okay, I’ll take those odds.”

Charlie grabbed the dictionary off Pitts and flicked through it, selecting a word blindly. He grinned and looked at Todd. “No way you’re gonna get this one. Efface.”

Todd furrowed his eyebrows together. “Shit.”

“Man, you are *so* doing my science homework,” Cameron smiled.

“Wait, let me think.” He sat there for a minute. Just thinking. Then he slammed his hand on one of the rocks and pointed at Charlie. “Efface! To erase something or to make yourself inconspicuous!”

“OH YOU DICKHEAD!” Charlie shouted, slamming the book shut. He groaned and put his head in his hands. “Now I have to do your fucking homework.”

“Nah, I like doing homework, I’ll let you off.” Todd said, smiling.

“You’re a saint, Todd Anderson.”

After about 45 more minutes of playing card games and just insulting the shit out of each other, they decided to pack it in and head back to the school. They collected all the rubbish that they'd discarded in the past few hours, “save the planet kids” as Pitts would say, and they started walking back.

It was a nice night, not cold or wet, and the moon and stars are clear in the sky above. Neil was gazing at the stars through the branches, he wanted to see them from a better view than this. So he did what he usually does, and slid up beside Todd, nudging him with his elbow.

“Beautiful night, right?” He asked.

“You want to go for a walk don’t you.” Todd said, not even bothering to glance at Neil.

“Oh how well you know me,” he grinned.

“Neil, it's so late already, we should just go to bed.”

“But the stars Todd!” Neil protested, waving his hand in the direction of the sky. “They call!”

“No, they really don’t.”

“Oh but they do, in fact, right now they’re pleading that we go get a better view of them. I think we should listen.” Neil grabbed Todd’s hand and started dragging him in a different direction then the group. The other poets would have been concerned when they realised that the two had disappeared, if this didn’t happen almost every time.

“Neilll,” Todd drawled.

“Todddd,” Neil replied, looking back at him. He was grinning, and even through the branches the moon was shining in his eyes. It pretty much immediately convinced Todd’s thought process to let himself be dragged through the forest.

After walking and stumbling for around ten minutes they walked into a clearing. Due to Todd’s hand still being in Neil’s, he was dragged to the ground when Neil suddenly and without warning decided he wanted to lie down.

“Do you know any constellations?” Todd whispered after a while. “I don’t think I’ve ever actually had any pointed out to me.”

“Well, you’ve asked the right person.” Neil answered, his eyes lighting up even brighter.

They lay there for an hour. Hands slotted comfortably in each others, Neil using his free hand to point out different constellations and stars.

“Stars are so beautiful,” Neil commented.

“They really are.” Todd replied, but he wasn’t looking at the sky.

Chapter End Notes

ngl the reason this took like two weeks is because i was not bothered at all. hehe sorry. also, it's surprisingly hard to write an essay about the same thing like six times and not just repeat the same thing over and over.

Chris Noel's Summer Party

Chapter Notes

i have come back from the dead.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At this point, Mr. Keating was prepared when he saw the subject in Gerard Pitts email.

Gerard Pitts- Todd Anderson

During my time at Welton, I've studied many poets. But for some reason, my favourite is someone who our lesson plan has foolishly never thought to include. Todd Anderson is my favourite poet. There are so many reasons for my answer, and I'm going to explain them.

The first reason comes down to his ability to write. I find it hard to write poetry and it shocks me sometimes just how easy it comes to him. He takes inspiration from the most mundane of topics or events and turns them into literary works of art. We went to Chris Noel's house one weekend last summer and Neil made one of the most burnt pieces of toast in history, then the next day Todd showed me a poem that he wrote just based on the concept. It was about the fact that in such a small amount of time, catastrophic damage can be done, and even though you only turned your back for a minute, irreparable mistakes can be made. And he got all of that from a piece of toast. That's impressive.

Another reason Todd is my favourite poet is because he finds so much joy in it. He might not be the most confident person out there but you can really tell that poetry is something he finds comfort in, and I think that's something a good poet needs. They need to feel it, to understand it. That's exactly what Todd does.

The last reason that I'm going to point out is that I haven't read much of Todd's poetry. This is a reason because if I can confidently claim that he's my favourite poet without having read much of his work, then that really speaks volumes.

Todd Anderson is my favourite poet, and I feel I have justified that in this essay.

Wonderful writing Mr. Pitts. Thank you for clearly stating your reasons, as well as finishing your conclusion with a nice wrapped up statement.

Chris Noel's Summer Party

"Hey guys!" Chris smiled, flinging open the door to greet the poets.

"Hey Chris!" They all replied, filing inside.

"Where do you want us to leave this?" Knox asked, tapping the box of beer that Meeks was holding.

"Oh you can just bring it into the kitchen," Chris said, walking in the direction as the poets followed. She opened the door and pointed to probably the only free bit of counter.

"Jesus Chris, are you cooking a ten course meal?" Neil asked.

"I was going to make food but I still have to set up so I won't have time to make all this." She sighed.

"If you want I could do it," Pitts offered. "You tell me what you want done and I can use the guys as my personal kitchen minions."

"Oh really!" Chris exclaimed. She rushed over and hugged him. "Thank you so much Pitts!"

"I don't think she ever hugged you that hard when you were dating," Charlie whispered to Knox. To which Knox responded by shoving him in the gut.

"I have a list that corresponds with pages in cookbooks. If one of you can help me get them then I'll leave you guys to it." Chris smiled.

"I can help," Neil added.

"Me too," Todd nodded.

"Awesome, this way!"

Chris set off down the hallway and the two boys followed a few paces behind her.

"Reckon we should tell her that none of us can cook?" Todd said to Neil.

Neil snickered and turned to Todd. “Nah, but she’ll probably figure it out when we start.”

They turned a corner and walked into a room that was covered in shelves upon shelves of books. Neil looked over at Todd, who was just staring in awe.

“Hey Chris, I think you broke Todd,” he laughed. She turned around and looked at Todd, who now had his mouth slightly agape.

“You can borrow books anytime Todd. This can be like your personal library.” She said, grabbing a sheet and walking over to them.

“Chris, did I ever tell you that you’re the only woman I love?” Todd mentioned.

“Well, you can be the only man I love!” She squeezed his shoulder and handed him the list. “I have to go do some things before everyone arrives, will you guys be okay to get the books yourselves?”

“Yeah no problem,” Neil said.

“Awesome. The cookbooks are on that shelf over there, and it’s alphabetized.”

“Chris, did I ever tell you that you’re also the only woman *I* love?” Neil laughed.

“Sorry, I only love one man. His name’s Todd,” she shrugged, walking out of the room.

“Damn, Todd, you woman stealer.”

“Look, she’s the only woman I’m ever gonna pull. Let me have this.” Todd said, walking to the shelf and pulling things off it. Neil walked over and started taking books off the higher shelves, while Todd focused on the bottom ones.

After a few minutes they had gotten all the books they needed and Todd stood back up. He was closer to Neil when he stood up than either of them had been expecting. They were close enough that if one of them leaned in about two inches their lips would be touching.

“Neil,” Todd whispered softly. “I-”

But he was cut short by a Meeks slamming open the door. They jumped apart and stared wide-eyed at Meeks.

“You guys are very slow at picking up books,” he announced. A little out of breath from running through the house. “Hurry up we don’t have all day.”

“Oh yeah, sorry,” Todd mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck. “We were just on our way.”

He made a beeline for the door and walked out of the room without so much of a glance back at Neil. Neil picked up the books that he had piled up and grabbed the list off the shelf, following Meeks back to the kitchen.

“Hey Pitts,” Neil asked, once they had returned. “How long do you reckon this is all gonna take?”

“I’d say there won’t be anything done for another 30 minutes, overall everything will be finished in like an hour and a half.”

“Oh alright, well I’m starving so I’m gonna make myself some toast.” Neil went over to the other side of the kitchen. He opened up the bread bin, took two slices, and put them into the toaster, setting it to five

While he was waiting on his toast he started making cupcake batter. It was probably the only thing that he was qualified to attempt to make. His cooking skills were, well, shit.

“Hey Neil, your toast is done!” Charlie called over the noise in the kitchen. Neil glanced over and looked at the toast sticking out of the toaster, it didn’t look crispy enough.

“Could you just stick it back on?” He called back. Charlie pushed button down and gave him a thumbs up. Neil continued with his batter, adding in some lemon zest that Pitts had grated. He was whisking it all up when Cameron turned to him and asked him, “Can you smell burning?”

“Shit!” Neil exclaimed. “My toast!”

He ran past him and around the island to the toaster. He slammed the up button and the two slices popped out. He grabbed them, hissing because they were scalding and dropped them on a plate. He looked down and all he could see was two pieces of charcoal.

“I don’t think that’s toast anymore,” Knox laughed. “That’s arson.”

“Holy fuck,” Charlie said. “How on earth did you do that?”

The poets had all stopped what they were doing and had gathered around Neil’s ‘toast’.

“I honestly have no idea.” Neil replied. “I just wanted crispy toast.”

“That goes beyond crispy.” Todd snickered.

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It was around one in the morning, and Todd was *very* drunk. Neil was in a similar state, but not as bad. They were stumbling back home, trying to support each other's weight but not doing a very good job at it. They stopped every few minutes to giggle, then continued on. Eventually, they made it back to Todd’s house. Neil had practically been living there all summer, and Todd’s parents were out of town this weekend, so they didn’t need to worry about getting in too late and waking them up.

Todd fumbled with keys and unlocked the door. They walked, well, fell in and Todd shut the door behind him. He locked it and slumped against the door.

“I don’t think I can make it upstairs,” he slurred.

“Well, you gotta, c’mon let’s go.” Neil grabbed his arm and they started up the stairs. It took about five minutes but they got there. They went to their respective rooms and changed into pyjamas, then took turns using the bathroom.

Todd was in the bathroom and Neil closed the door to his room. He turned off the light and slid into bed. A minute later he heard his door open and Todd bump into his drawer.

“Neil,” Todd whispered. “Are you here?”

“Yeah?”

“Move over, I wanna get in.” He lifted the covers and lightly pushed Neil to the other side of the bed. He got in and wrapped himself in the covers. “It’s too cold in my room. Can I stay here?”

“Sure,” Neil replied. Todd looked up at him and grinned. “Hey, can I ask you a question before you go to sleep?”

“Okay,” Todd nodded, his eyes closed.
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“What were you going to say earlier?”

“Oh that? I just wanted to say that you eyes are fucking gorgeous.” He hummed. Neil just looked at him, slightly taken aback. He stared for a few minutes until Todd’s breathing evened out and he had fallen asleep. Eventually, after about an hour of thinking, Neil fell asleep too.

Chapter End Notes

> two essays left, but i think i might do like a few more chapters after them.

Problems

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Onto the next,” Mr Keating sighed. Richard Cameron. You’ll never guess who he wrote his essay on.

Richard Cameron- Todd Anderson

There are so many poets I could have written about, but the one I picked is someone that I don’t think many people thought of. Todd Anderson.

Todd Anderson is an amazing poet and I would be willing to go down on this hill. He writes poetry with such ease, comparable to the ease of the greats. He’s spurted out more poems in the last few years than I think I’ve ever had to study. I hope that when I have kids and they’re in school, Todd’s poems are the ones they’ll be studying. He’s quite shy about his poetry. Hopefully he’ll open up about it more in the future.

I admire how much he loves poetry. Whenever he has spare time he’s usually reading, and 9/10 times it’s a poetry book. I was tutoring Neil once and Todd was just sitting on the couch reading. I think he was reading a book called Crush, but I’m not sure of the author. He was there before we got there and I’m sure he was still reading long after we left. He was annotating it too, which is impressive to me because annotating a regular book can be hard, but poetry? You have to properly understand things to comment on them.

His poems are also pretty relatable. When we read older poems, it can be hard to relate because they’re of a different time than us. It can be harder to connect with the problems they might talk about. But with Todd it’s stuff that makes sense to me, although that could be because it’s not written in like 17th century English. Either way, poems are better in my opinion when you can understand what the poet is saying without having to take a deep dive and practically translate what they’re trying to say.

Todd Anderson is my favourite poet, and I’m glad that I’ve had the privilege of reading some of his poems.

Thank you for this great essay Mr. Cameron, and what you said at the start about picking someone not lots of people would think of, your friends may have something to say about that. So far I've read five essays including yours on Mr. Anderson, and I'm positive that there is one more I've yet to read. Well done, keep up the good work.

Problems

"No, you're still doing it wrong," Cameron sighed, pointing at Neil's page.

"But, that's what you said isn't it? That it goes over 1000?" Neil protested.

"No, it equals 1000x if it has 3 repeating numbers, but that only has two. So it's 100x and then when you do the rest of the equation it would turn into 33/99 and you can simplify it into 1/3."

"But why 99?" Neil asked.

"No fucking clue to be honest," Cameron admitted. "That's just how we have to do it."

"Maths is stupid."

"True."

They had been going over recurring decimals for about 15 minutes and Neil still wasn't entirely sure what he was doing, but Cameron seemed happy with any progress that he was making considering it usually took about an hour for Neil to grasp what he was saying.

Todd was sitting on a couch just across from their table reading. Neil couldn't really make out the title from the angle he was at. Every few minutes Todd would pick up a highlighter and go over a line, or take a pen and write something in margins. Then he would put a coloured tab on it, measuring the distance from the page to the part on the outside so that it would be sticking out just right. Neil saw him doing this and started smiling. He had tuned out Cameron and just looked at Todd for a few minutes. The autumn light filtering through the window and lighting up his hair just right, making it a golden colour. The concentrated look he had on his face. The fact that whenever he marked something in his book he would stick out his tongue the slightest bit and furrow his eyebrows, like it was helping him to focus.

Neil was broken out of his little world when Cameron cleared his throat, he turned to him and saw that he was smirking at him.

“ You’ve been staring at Todd for about five minutes, have you developed a crush or something?” He asked, laughing.

Neil’s face went a shade of red and he tried to stutter out a response but he wasn’t quick enough and Cameron shot his eyebrows up, his eyes widening. “Oh shit! You have!”

“Actually,” Neil said, looking down at his watch. “I think I have to go now, yeah, I have, uh, something I said I’d do. Really, sorry,” He shrugged, stuffing his books in his bag and zipping it before quickly making his way out of the room.

“Wait Neil, I was joking, come back!” Cameron called after him, but he was already gone.

He was just walking, not entirely sure which direction he was going but before he knew it he was standing outside of Charlie’s room and knocking on the door.

“Come in!” Charlie called and Neil swung open the door.

“I have a problem.” Neil announced. Charlie was sitting on his bed and Knox was sitting at Charlie’s desk, they were both doing homework.

“You have a problem?” Knox asked. “What kind of problem?”

“I’m in love with my best friend,” Neil breathed out quickly.

“I’m afraid I’m already taken Neil-,” Charlie started.

“Not you dipshit, Todd!”

“Oh I know, I’m just being annoying.”

“Okay well can we be serious for a few minutes?”

“Yeah, sorry.” Charlie nodded, patting the bed for Neil to sit down.

“What do I do?” Neil asked, slightly panicked.

“Well, uh,” Knox began. “Tell him maybe?”

“Tell him? Are you mad!?”

“Knox has a point you know. I mean it worked for us.” Charlie responded.

“But I’m not you! It could completely ruin our friendship. If he doesn’t like me the same way it would just be awkward forever.”

“So you’re just going to sit on these feelings then?”

“Probably.”

“Take it from someone with experience,” Knox said. “That will make your life a living hell.”

“But, what if he doesn’t love me back?” Neil whispered.

“Trust me Neil. Todd loves you back.” Charlie said confidently.

“You can’t be sure though.”

“If you ask literally any of the poets, I guarantee that they'll tell you with 100% conviction that he loves you as well.”

“You really must be blind if you don’t notice the way he looks at you.” Knox added.

“Really?”

“Yes.” They both replied.

“Neil,” Charlie asked. “Did you actually *read* the poem he gave you?”

“Obviously Charlie, I have it framed.”

“No, that’s not what I meant. Do you know what it’s about?”

“Yeah. It’s about the characters in a book. He told me all about it.”

“You’re a fucking idiot.” Charlie stood up off the bed and walked out of the room. He came back two minutes later holding the framed poem. He sat back down and read it out loud.

“*My muse, my love, but he does not know the latter. He will never, because if it were to slip from my mouth I would be a damned man. Discarded and forgotten I would drift from my life, left but an empty shell of myself.*” Charlie read the poem and finished it giving Neil a pointed look. “Please, Neil, impart your wisdom on what this poem is about.”

“It’s about the characters in The Picture of Dorian Gray. We studied it in English last year and I had talked about how much I loved it. He knew that Basil was my favourite character so he wrote it from his perspective on Dorian.” Neil explained.

“Oh you sweet summer child,” Charlie sighed. “He literally wrote you a fucking poem about how he loved you and you somehow missed the point.”

“I don’t see what you mean? It’s just about characters in a book.”

“It really isn’t. You know that all of our poems were jokes right? Mine was fucking acrostic. But he made yours so personal. Even if you’re choosing to believe it's not about you, he still put so much more meaning into it.”

“I never thought about it like that.” Neil said, looking wistful. He still wasn’t entirely sold. The only way to really be sure was to tell him, but he didn’t think he could do that yet.

Chapter End Notes

> as soon as i can find way to weasel a dorian gray reference into anything i will.

Practice

Chapter Notes

bro i'm so sorry i just dipped off the face of the earth

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One more left, Mr Keating thought. He didn't even need to read the subject line for this one.

Neil Perry- Todd Anderson

My favourite poet of all time is Todd Anderson and in this essay I am going to outline why exactly I feel this way.

I read and write poetry, but Todd Anderson is different. Todd doesn't read or write poetry, he lives and breathes it. While most people have to search between the lines to understand what certain poets are saying Todd absorbs the knowledge at a glance. His own poetry preserves the moments and feelings which he writes about. Like they are frozen in time. Some of his poems strike you deep in your core and make you reflect on your life through the lenses of his eyes.

I think that the number one reason however is that he never actually acknowledges how good he is at writing poetry. I mean he must know that he can do it well, but I don't think he knows just how well that is. Whenever I try to tell him he just blushes and says thank you but I don't think he ever properly takes the compliment. I think it shows how truly good he is at writing poetry. It comes so naturally to him that he doesn't expect compliments, because he doesn't do it to get them.

Sometimes he leaves his notebooks open on his desk, and for a few minutes while he leaves the room I read what's on the page that gets left open and it's beautiful. I wish sometimes that he would share more of his writing with the world but I can understand that it's not something that he would want to do. Perhaps for Christmas I could get him a few nicer notebooks, as his are currently full. They have poems scrawled on every page and bits of paper shoved loosely or stapled in, so he really does need new ones, but I digress.

I once read a poem that he wrote about the eyes of a lover. How they look at you softly and carefully. I'm not sure who he wrote the poem about, or if it was even based on anyone at all. But when I read it I

just pictured Todd's eyes. Maybe because he was on my mind, considering he wrote the poem. I do think however that his eyes can be like that sometimes, soft and careful.

My favourite nights are the ones when he'll be writing and I'll be reading or doing homework and he'll kind of cough a little to get my attention and then ask me if I want to read something he's written. I really don't see the point in him asking because he knows the answer will always be yes. It's fun to read his poems since it's really him opening up to you in such a clear and defined way. If he ever needs to tell me stuff he doesn't really want to voice out loud he writes stuff and gives it to me. I think that really shows his talent, the fact that he can just write his emotions down so easily is quite impressive.

I dream of a day that kids like us are sitting in class listening to their teacher read out a poem to them. They'll listen intently and jot down notes in their notebooks on the different poetic devices and the meaning. That poem will be written by Todd Anderson. His work deserves to be studied.

I really do think that the main reason I can connect to his poetry so much is that I know him so well. If I didn't, maybe it would be harder to grasp, but because I do I can see the layers and the feelings that he writes about. I can see them because most of the time I witness them first hand. That's what makes his poetry special to me.

In conclusion, Todd Anderson is my favourite poet and when he publishes his first book, I'll be sure to buy the first copy.

This is extremely well written, Mr Perry. You've done an amazing job, well done.

Mr. Keating pushed his chair away from the desk and sighed. He did not get paid enough to read the ramblings of a very head over heels teenager.

Practice

It was Saturday, and it was raining. The poets had planned a meeting but then Meeks had gotten sick, which inevitably led to Pitts getting sick. That was two members down for the count, so they decided to give the meeting a rain check until everyone was feeling better.

Neil was sitting on his bed finishing up his homework and not

knowing what he was going to do for the rest of the day. “Hey Todd, do you wanna do something?”

“I don’t think there’s much we can do, it’s raining pretty hard out there,” Todd replied, nodding his head in the direction of the window.

“Why not live a little?” Neil questioned, raising his eyebrows.

“I do plenty of living, just living where I’m warm, and not getting soaked.”

“Oh c’mon it’ll be fun, we could dance in the rain. Or we could go for a bike ride, or we could go to the cave, that way we’ll be dry.” Neil suggested.

“Alright, fine.” Todd reluctantly agreed. Neil grinned and clapped his hands together, he jumped off his bed and pulled his shoes on. Todd did the same and soon Neil was dragging him out into the cold.

They ran through the school grounds and into the trees. Neither of them stopped running until they reached the cave. Neil pulled out a lighter and lit a few of the candles they had put around the place. Todd was rubbing his hands together desperately trying to regenerate the feeling in his fingers.

“Cold hands?” Neil asked.

“I think I have pneumonia. When my fingers fall off I hope you know this is your fault.” Todd answered.

“You know Todd, next year the drama club is doing Romeo and Juliet. You should audition for Romeo, you’re just as dramatic as him.”

“I’d probably go into cardiac arrest if I was on stage,” Todd laughed. “Are you planning on trying out?”

“Yeah I think I will. I don’t really want to go for Romeo, maybe Mercutio or Benvolio. Probably Mercutio.” Neil nodded.

“Can’t wait to buy tickets,” Todd smiled.

“See! You would make a good Romeo, with all that charm.”

“I have as much charm as a rock, Neil. Plus, even if I was getting over the stage thing, I don’t think I’d like to have to kiss someone in front of people. That’s weird. Especially someone I don’t really know.”

“No fear, I’ll go for Juliet. Boom, kissing someone you know.” Neil was 100% that what he had just said would have Todd in a coughing fit. He was right. About a minute later Todd was breathing evenly again, but he still had a pink tint to his cheeks.

“I was only joking.” Neil said, moving slightly closer to Todd. “I don’t think I’d like kissing someone in front of people either. Especially if I really liked them.”

It took Todd a full ten seconds to properly digest what Neil had said, but he still wasn’t completely sure. “Sorry, what?”

“I think,” Neil started, “that it would be hard to kiss someone I really liked for the first time in front of other people.”

Every single voice in Todd’s head was telling him to disregard what Neil said, he didn’t mean it that way, surely. But he had spent his entire life listening to those voices. Not today.

“Maybe,” Todd said, taking a deep breath and looking straight up at Neil, “you should get in some practice.”

Todd hadn’t noticed just how close they were until Neil was cupping his cheek with his hand and whispering to him. “Can I kiss you?”

“Yes. Please,” Todd breathed. Then, like it was the most natural thing in the world, the two of them were kissing. The kiss was slow and tender, they didn’t have anything else to care about, just each other. Todd pulled out of the kiss first to catch his breath. Neil opened his eyes. He had the widest smile on his face and it was less then a second before Todd was grabbing his face again and kissing him. This time it was more urgent, like his life depended on it. Todd wrapped his arms around Neil’s neck and pulled him closer.

Neil’s mind was spiralling. He was kissing *Todd.* His best friend. Who he had been in love with for god knows how long. It wasn’t a dream, this was actually happening. He pulled his head back and smiled at Todd, kissing his cheek one more time.

“So, will you audition with me for Romeo and Juliet now?” He asked, a sly grin spreading across his face.

"Absolutely not. I will however help you practice, like, a lot."

Chapter End Notes

i'm thinking like one or two more chapters. i vow to have this finished by christmas. if i don't you have permission to actively bug me about it.

A Month Later

Chapter Notes

> and finally, i've finsihed it. happy christmas, hanukkah, and anything else anyone might be doing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Month Later

Charlie was extremely sure that Neil and Todd had finally started dating, but he didn't really have much proof to go on. Well, to himself he had proof. They just seemed to act differently around each other. More often than not they were sitting *right* beside each other, a little too close for friends. Also the way that they looked at each other. Neil had always looked at Todd like he hung the stars in the sky, but now he looked at him like he'd seen it happen.

His suspicions were finally confirmed one Saturday, completely by accident.

The poets were sitting around a table attempting to finish bits of homework. It wasn't going very well so far, as after about 10 seconds of silence someone would start a new conversation, leaving everyone to swiftly abandon their work.

"Look," Pitts said, "I'm just saying that Wes Anderson is *my* favourite director, I never said that it meant everyone else sucked."

"But you're just so blatantly incorrect, best director is obviously Christopher Nolan," Cameron replied.

"You're both wrong, it's a scientific fact that Jordan Peele wins that debate," Meeks shrugged and went back to his work.

"Nothing beats an 80's movie. Spielberg." Charlie stated. "E.T., The Goonies, a.k.a masterpieces."

"None of you are going to sway me," Pitts argued. "Wes Anderson is perfect. His films have such a unique style, and if you're watching one you just know that he made it. That's pretty impressive-,"

He was about to finish his sentence when Neil cut him off.

“Oh shit I’m gonna be late for rehearsals!” He exclaimed, grabbing his bag and jumping out of his chair. He ended up auditioning for Romeo and Juliet, he was playing Mercutio. “Hey Todd, could you bring my books back to our room if you guys leave before I come back?”

“Yeah sure thing,” Todd replied, smiling. Neil leaned down and kissed Todd’s cheek before running out of the room, positively oblivious to what he just did. Charlie nearly had an aneurysm. Unlike Neil, Todd was very aware about what had happened and his eyes nearly popped out of his sockets. The rest of the poets had their mouths hanging wide open and Knox was trying desperately hard to keep in his laughter.

The sound that came from the hallway was comical. The skid of shoes, followed by, “Oh *fuck*. ”

Neil’s head appeared back around the corner. “Would you believe me if I told you that was a joke?”

“Neil Perry get your ass back in that chair.” Charlie demanded, pointing to his empty seat. Neil just laughed and went to sit back down. “How long?”

“A month,” Neil answered.

“A MONTH?!” The entire table shouted back.

“How the fuck did you hide that from us?” Cameron asked.

“No, more importantly, *why* did you hide that from us? From *me* ! We’re best friends for god’s sake!” Charlie spluttered out.

“I don’t know, honestly. Kind of stupid, really.” Neil shrugged. “Forgive us?”

Charlie considered it for a few seconds before grinning. “On one condition.”

“Go ahead?” Neil responded quizzically.

“Todd, was Neil’s poem about Basil and Dorian or the two of you?”

Todd’s cheeks went slightly red and he started flicking through his notebook. He mumbled under his breath. “Us.”

“Sorry, Todd, I didn’t quite catch that? Mind repeating?”

“Us.” Todd said, moderately louder.

“I fucking knew it!” Charlie shouted, giving Knox a high five. “See, Neil, I told you.”

Neil was slightly shocked. He really had thought that it was just about book characters. He turned to Todd.

“I’m your muse?” He grinned.

“Oh shut up,” Todd scowled. “Charlie I hate you, I’m never going to hear the end of this.”

“Absolutely not.” Charlie agreed, still wearing that shit eating grin that he had practically patented at this point. “I personally, am never going to let you forget about it.”

“Just to spite you I’ll never write a poem again.”

“I don’t think you could survive a week without writing something.”

“Okay maybe, but I still hate you. I might write a poem about how much I hate you.”

“Pipe down Walt Whitman.” Charlie said, sticking his tongue out. He turned around to Neil. “I have a very important question. Have you guys kissed yet?”

“Yeah.” Neil smiled. Pitts being Pitts decided to give them a round of applause that the entire table then got involved in. After about five minutes of cheering and clapping they quietened down.

“I need you to tell me everything.” Charlie said, leaning his chin on his palm.

“We’re not 12 year old girls, Charlie.” Neil responded.

“I told you about when I first kissed Knox!” Charlie exclaimed.

“You did??” Knox asked.

“Hush, Knoxious, the grownups are talking.”

“I’m seriously thinking about breaking up with you.”

“You and Todd, and your empty threats.”

“Perhaps.”

“Anyways,” Charlie continued, “please, do tell.”

“Maybe tomorrow, when Todd isn’t sitting right beside me.”

“Great!” Charlie smiled.

“There’s one person that you still have to tell, you know.” Cameron said. He didn’t even have to finish his sentence, they all knew who he meant.

“Mr. Keating.”

Chapter End Notes

i would like to thank t.rex for fuelling this entire chapter. absolutely could not have done this without marc bolan in the background. hope you all didn't find this too boring, and i hope you have a nice rest of the year:-)

also hello to my friend emily, if you're reading this. props to you for finding my ao3 account. hope you didn't cringe too much.

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